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Written on DECEMBER 15, 2011 AT 8:30 AM by PROSS

Passages and Remembrance

Filed under UNCATEGORIZED

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By Capt. Bruce Meneley, commanding officer, NATO Role 3 Multinational Medical Unit, Kandahar, Afghanistan.



Staff members pay respect to a fallen service member at the NATO Role 3 Multinational Medical Unit.

The Role 3 staff members have maintained an amazing survival rate for incoming U.S. casualties since we arrived in August. There is a 100% survival rate for those arriving with a pulse. We have also literally brought back several from the dead, arriving in full arrest with cardiopulmonary resuscitation in progress, through heroic and extraordinary efforts by the trauma teams. However, sometimes troops have sustained injuries that are incompatible with survival, often only determined after the staff have expended every effort and poured their hearts and souls into saving

them. It becomes very personal.

If a person doesn't survive, a guard is posted and they are covered with a flag. The deceased is then escorted by the chaplain out a back passageway. During this process, the staff gathers in this passage to pay their final respects and to reconcile their feelings.

Members of the person's unit join us, some on gurneys or in wheelchairs who have been injured in the same incident. Between saluting ranks the chaplain says a few departing words. We learn their names and sometimes where they are from. We recognize their sacrifices and our efforts to save them.

Then three bells sound. "Ding. Ding. Ding." "Warrior, departing."

They are then escorted through the doors.

Recently we received a gift from a woman who, after suddenly losing her brother, painted a picture of an angel that brought her peace.

After reading a series of articles in the Virginia Pilot (A Chance in Hell, <http://hamptonroads.com/achanceinhell>) she felt compelled to send the picture to us in the hope it might provide some peace for us as well. On unrolling the first thing we noticed was the Purple Heart. There was no question where this would go. The SeaBees were asked to frame the picture and took the project to heart producing a frame inlaid with Purple Heart

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wood along with a framed poem and a banner “Fallen Angels” across the top, unveiled on December 7th.



A painting of an angel hangs in the hallway of the NATO Role 3 Multinational Medical Unit. The painting was sent by a woman who had recently lost her brother in hopes that it would bring the staff members peace.

This angel now gazes upon our departing “fallen angels”.

During this holiday season we remember and honor our national heroes, our fallen angels. Although separated from our families we feel privileged to be taking care of our wounded, recognizing their sacrifices, honoring their service and sending them back to their families. We hope you remember and honor them too.

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